

Randi and others. Another remarkable psychic investigated by Benson Herbert was Suzanne Padfield, the British clairvoyant whose ability in psychometry led to the discovery of a child-killer 1700 miles away in Moscow. In the Paralab an experiment involved the displacement of a polarised light beam. Miss Padfield, together with the designer of much of the experimental equipment (Brian Baily), placed her hands around the collimating tube and successfully 'distorted' the light path in a consistent manner.

More recent projects at the Paralab have included an investigation into psychic healing, experiments with bacteria and viruses and the study of dermo-optics, including the ability to sense colours and writing through the fingers. This latter work in collaboration with Yvonne Duplessis (Paris) may assist blind and colour-blind people in their daily lives. Over the last ten years I have been involved with the Paralab as a member of technical and experimental support teams, designing and building equipment when necessary which would be used for the biophysical measurement of subjects during a variety of clairvoyance and PK psi-related experiments.

It is paradoxical, I think, that such a character as Benson Herbert should provoke controversy from the spiritualist and physicist ends of the paranormal investigation community alike. He would be pleased perhaps to think so. Benson's quest, I believe, was not to explain away paranormal phenomena in terms of physical-particle theories or cause-and-effect relationships, but to investigate the nature of psi phenomena in the hope that his findings, together with the problems left by classical and theoretical physics, could be combined to allow a fuller understanding of the Universe around us.

The quarterly *International Journal of Paraphysics* has been published from 1968 into the 1990s and has included Paralab reports periodically. Over the years much correspondence on behalf of the SPR has been taken up by the Paralab staff.

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## HANS BENDER: "FRONTIER SCIENTIST" — A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

Professor Bender's death—he died in Freiburg on 7th May at the age of 84—has closed an important chapter of German post-war parapsychology. In my opinion, any future historian who finds it worthwhile to pay a closer look at parapsychology in general will surely rank Hans Bender among the pioneers of German psi research who, like Albert von Schrenck-Notzing or Rudolf Tischner (among others), spent most of their professional lives struggling for the advancement and recognition of our field.

So, let me first recapitulate some data of Bender's biography and then give an impression of Bender's personal 'ausstrahlung', his special 'aura'.

Hans Bender was born in 1907 in Freiburg. In 1987 he wrote a short autobiographical note for Rosemarie Pilkington's book, *Men and Women in Parapsychology*, which represents in a sense his last contribution to the field

that he was able to finish. In that piece, Bender describes how, as a seventeen-year-old boy staying in London with a family with spiritualist leanings, he took part in automatic spelling by using the Ouija board: "I was impressed," he wrote, "by the obvious 'intelligent' production of the messages but skeptical in regard to their alleged origin, namely 'discarnate' entities. This primary experience influenced my life."

In the years between 1925 and 1933 Bender studied French literature, philosophy and psychology in Paris, Heidelberg and Bonn. It was especially after attending the lectures given by the French psychiatrist Pierre Janet at the Collège de France in Paris and after studying Janet's classic work *L'Automatisme Psychologique* that Bender decided to study experimentally the dynamics of subconscious processes at the Psychological Institute, Bonn University, supported by the head of the Institute, the philosopher and psychologist Erich Rothacker. Bender was intrigued by the observation that some of his subjects were able to exhibit 'intelligent' activities on the 'subconscious' level (as documented by their automatic writing) while the 'conscious' self was seemingly unaware of such complicated processes. In such a state of dissociation, some of the automatic productions included traces of information which their producers appeared not to have acquired through conventional means. In 1933 Bender obtained his Ph.D. degree with a thesis on *Psychische Automatismen* [Mental Automatisms], in which he successfully linked subconscious productions with the problem of ESP. A second contribution devoted exclusively to the study of clairvoyance under laboratory conditions followed shortly after and was published in the prestigious *Zeitschrift für Psychologie* [Journal of Psychology] in 1934. Just before he finished his paper, the philosopher Gerda Walther, acting as a clearing-house for relevant information, had sent him the recently-published book *Extrasensory Perception* by J. B. Rhine. Bender always stressed the importance of that book in strengthening his desire to introduce parapsychological research into a German university in an institutionalised form—a desire vigorously supported by a prominent German professor of philosophy in those years, namely Hans Driesch, who had published in 1932 the German methodological introduction to the field, his well-known book *Parapsychologie: die Wissenschaft von den 'okkulten' Erscheinungen*. In order to be as well equipped as possible to realise such an ambitious project, Bender finished his additional studies of medicine and began training as a psychiatrist without, however, completing that medical specialisation. After the outbreak of war, he had to finish off his 'habilitation' in 1941 with experimental work on eidetic imagery and crystal-gazing, and he was awarded a professorship at Strasbourg University, where he founded an 'Institute for Psychology and Clinical Psychology, belonging to the Philosophical as well as the Medical faculty, which he directed until 1944 when Strasbourg was liberated by Allied forces.

The 'official' beginning of German post-war parapsychology can be traced back with some justification to 1950. In that year, Bender was able to open his native town of Freiburg im Breisgau the doors of his somewhat miraculously financed 'Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene' [Institute for Fringe Areas of Psychology and Mental Health], which

substantially funded in the ensuing years by a legacy from the Swiss biologist and poltergeist researcher, Dr Fanny Moser, who died in 1953. One year later there followed the establishment of a Chair for 'Fringe Areas of Psychology' at Freiburg University. It was the first step towards the official recognition of parapsychology as a legitimate field of study. In 1967 the chair was extended to cover general psychology as well as fringe areas of psychology (parapsychology), and additionally a Department for Fringe Areas of Psychology was established at the Psychological Institute of Freiburg University. One year later, in 1968, Bender hosted the eleventh PA Convention in Freiburg, and he served as PA President for 1969. After his mandatory retirement from the university chair in 1975, his colleague Johannes Mischo took it over, whereas Bender remained until his death the Director of the independent Institut at Eichhalde 12.

In a sense, the 'Eichhalde-Institut' was Bender's most personal creation. For decades it represented in the Federal Republic of Germany an unrivalled centre for parapsychological research, information and advice, inspired by the tireless efforts of its founder. Quite a number of active workers in the field got their first impressions of psi research by visiting the Bender institute. An endless stream of visitors from all over the world were full of praise for its beautiful location overlooking the Rhine valley (I mean the river, of course) and the hospitality of its director. Among the visitors were mediums and magicians, astrologers and ufologists, dowers and numerologists, witches and healers, gurus and charlatans, spiritualists and hostile sceptics, psychotics and serious scientists; classes of students, TV teams and hard-nosed journalists — they all came to Freiburg to see and to talk to the famous professor. Hans Bender's university lectures, courses and seminars won legendary fame among generations of Freiburg students. "Wir gehen zur Benders Märchenstunde" [We are going to listen to Bender's fairy tales] was a proverbial saying of those years. Bender's regular lectures on Tuesday afternoons between five and six which he held for decades at the 'Aula' of Freiburg University (he invariably arrived late) were always overcrowded with hundreds of people; not only university students, from the humanities as well as the natural sciences, but also 'ordinary' people from the city of Freiburg who were interested in the 'occult' or paranormal. In general, Bender's audience was enthralled, with mixed feelings of amusement and fascination, as the professor, with his face lit only by a reading lamp and the lecture theatre in pitch darkness, began to report on experiences, phenomena and events which seemed to transcend the usual categories of space and time — parapsychology at its best. It was on such public occasions that Bender's charismatic personality could be felt with all its suggestive power — nobody was able to present his researches on certain poltergeist phenomena or metal-benders in such a convincing manner — and boring questions regarding trivial details could easily be compared to a *crimen majestatis*, a *lèse-majesté*. Many of Bender's audience had the feeling that the lecturer behind the reading desk was not just an ordinary professor presenting his usual subject-matter, but that, on the contrary, they were listening to somebody who was completely convinced of the apparently unbelievable that most of his fellow scientists would mock at. So, Hans Bender was the prototype of a 'frontier scientist'. It is impossible to separate the man from

his work. His personal style of life determined his style of work and vice versa. Hans Bender's 'search for psi' was not only a search for 'objective' data and records, it was also a personal 'quest for the grail', a deep-seated curiosity for phenomena and experiences beyond the visible horizon or conventional boundaries. He was a scientific adventurer always in search of new and surprising facts. It was impossible for him to separate the paranormal phenomenon he was after from the persons who were experiencing it, and so, time and again, he was prepared for new encounters to learn about the paranormal. One of Bender's basic convictions in dealing with the elusiveness of psi was the importance of an 'affective field' [emotional or affective field]. Without such a positive 'catalyst', he often maintained, there was no psychic functioning, let alone successful psi-experimentation.

Bender's contributions to the field are multi-faceted, but foremost among his research interests was qualitative and field work. I hardly need mention that he was the investigator of dozens of RSPK cases — the topic of his Presidential Address — among them the famous Rosenheim poltergeist case, another important area was empirical work on the problem of precognition, need only point to the so-called 'chair experiments' with the Dutch pignos Gerard Croiset, developed and performed frequently in collaboration with his friend Wilhelm Tenhaeff, or the study of the precognitive dreams of the Hamburg actress Mrs Mylius.

In 1981, in an obituary to his friend Tenhaeff, Bender wrote: "He tried to make visible the paranormal in its entirety to a scientific community which was, with a few exceptions, struck with blindness with regard to a 'hidden reality'". May I say that that is also Hans Bender's legacy which he left for his friends and colleagues who are missing him.

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